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241729Z Feb 06

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000287

SIPDIS

STATE PASS DOE FOR DAS JBRODMAN AND CGAY
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS AND SRENENDER
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR MARAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ
STATE FOR DS/IP/AF, AF/EX, DS/IP/OPO, DS/ICI/PII, DS/DSS/ITA
LONDON PASS TO AMBASSADOR CAMPBELL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/23/2016

TAGS: [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [KHLs](#) [PINR](#) [ETRD](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: HOSTAGE-TAKING, SITREP #8

REF: LAGOS 279 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reasons 1.4 (D & E)

Hostage Welfare Update

1. (C) Constituting the first proof of life since the crisis began, MEND released several undated photographs of the hostages last night. Individual photographs of each of the hostages as well as two group photographs, one showing seven and one showing four of the nine hostages, backed by masked militants pointing weapons at them, were released to the media. The militants also released statements confirming the photographs of their "guests" pictured with some members of the group who captured them. The statement denied negotiations with the GON were being held.

2. (C) Shell officials had contact with a reporter they consider an outstanding source who claimed to have visited the kidnappers in their camp and interviewed AmCit Macon Hawkins. Hawkins was the only hostage the reporter saw. Hawkins confirmed he has received his medication, and he and the other hostages are being treated well. The reporter met with mid-level militant leaders who told him the hostages would not be released unless POTUS guaranteed that efforts would be taken to bring economic development to the Niger Delta. The journalist also reported the usual collection of arms, including general purpose machine guns, kalishnikovs, and RPGs. (Comment: We cannot ascertain whether the statement about US involvement has become part of the militants' "official" demands, particularly since this does not come from one of the top leaders. However, it probably is representative of sentiment within the ranks of the kidnappers to internationalize the situation due to the profound mistrust of the GON. End comment.)

3. (C) FBI in Houston are in daily contact with AmCit hostages' families. Willbros is working with the Thai and Egyptian missions here to reach those hostages' families.

4. (C) Preparations are underway to send family letters and additional medicine deliveries to the hostages over the weekend. Willbros reports they are working to provide daily updates to Thai and Philippine missions.

Negotiations Update

5. (S/NF) In a conversation today, Lagos State Governor Tinubu said he visited former Bayelsa Governor Alamieyeseigha to discuss the hostage crisis. Alamieyeseigha told Tinubu he has not been in contact with the kidnappers. He agreed to pass a message to release the hostages unharmed. With regard to Delta Governor Ibori, Tinubu described him as scared. He said his Delta State colleague felt caught between President Obasanjo who strongly dislikes him, and the kidnappers who are wary of him. In fact, Ibori will be very cautious in striking a deal with the kidnappers, fearing that they would retaliate against him should the GON not honor the commitments he would have made on Abuja's behalf, according to Tinubu. (Comment: Events have shown that, of any of the known politicians of the Delta area, former Governor Alamieyeseigha retains the most influence and goodwill among the hostage-takers. While his message might not be dispositive, a constructive message from him will be a positive development. End comment.)

6. (C) Two Ijaw pop musicians whose uncle is an important Ijaw spiritual figure told us they have asked their uncle to intercede with the kidnappers for the hostages' release. The duo claims their uncle has been talking to the kidnappers. The pair said their uncle will not raise the issue with the kidnappers until Monday because the militants are angry about

last week's GON attacks and unwilling to discuss compromise.

17. (C) Shell community sources report the negotiating group has split, with the field commanders disagreeing over terms with Government Ekpemukpolo and others in Warri conducting negotiations with intermediaries from Delta State. Shell claims someone "much nastier" than Ekpemukpolo is running the field operations.

Energy Update: Shell Facilities Still Closed

18. (C) There is no change in the status of damaged or closed Shell facilities, and production remains reduced approximately 550,000 bpd. Shell received reports the Odidi 2 manifold was blown up, but no damage assessment has been done due to the withdrawal of personnel. Odidi 2 is in the western operations area which is already shutdown, so there is no additional production impact.

19. (C) Power generation remains down by approximately 850 MW (of a total of 3200 MW nationwide) due to a damaged gas feeder line, which cannot be repaired until the security situation improves.

110. (C) Chevron report no disruptions in production (see para 13 about a potential threat against Chevron). Agip, Total, Exxon, and other oil companies also report no problems.

Military Update

111. (S/NF) A senior GON official said President Obasanjo told Delta Governor Ibori last Saturday (the day of the kidnapping attack) to resolve the crisis quickly or the military would act. The same source also said that Obasanjo met with his senior military staff recently and said now that the zonal constitutional conferences are over he was ready to fix his attention on the Delta. Obasanjo purportedly said that as early as the beginning of next week he was prepared to make a decision on whether to take military action. (Note: Six public townhall hearings were held this week, one in each geographic zone, on constitutional reforms, including an amendment allowing a third Presidential term. End note.)

Media Update

112. (SBU) The hostage crisis has become a magnet to groups and individuals who would like nothing better than to escalate tension around this matter. A heretofore unknown Ijaw group, the Warri Ijaw Peace Monitoring Group (WIPMG), released a statement warning the US against intervention in the Delta. The statement said the group had proof the US was planning to deploy Marines to assist the Nigerian military in the Delta. (Comment: New groups are appearing and issuing press statements with increasing frequency as the crisis continues. That such a group would spin a tale of US intervention out of thin air underscores the edginess that permeates the Delta. Unfortunately, it will be believed by many. This could complicate negotiations for the hostages' release and also cause anti-American sentiment where before there was none among the hostage-takers. End comment.)

113. (SBU) Media reports Ijaw leaders in Gbaramatu, near Warri, released a statement threatening Chevron over the termination of 12 employees for alleged participation in the 2003 Warri crisis. The statement threatened that unless the 12 were reinstated within 48 hours action would be taken against the company's oil production capability.

Consular Update

114. (C) All Consular staff are accounted for. There have been no reports of additional attacks on AmCits.
BROWNE